

# Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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## Denominational Work

That brilliant preacher, the Rev. Thomas Dixon, Jr., who several years ago retired from the Baptist pulpit and started the non-denominational "Peoples' Church," recently announced that he would give up the effort for the very good reason that it was a failure. It is an impossibility, he says, to organize an effective non-denominational church with its one condition of membership, faith in Christ. "What the work gains in breadth it loses in vital forces." His conclusion is that there is no call for Christian unity. Gifted, eloquent, broad minded, honest and earnest, it must be a great bitterness to look upon the ruins of his cherished ideal.

In the midst of this modern movement in the direction of fraternity among the various evangelical denominations, it is well to study an experience and an experiment like Dixon's, and find out how much of wisdom and practical common sense there is in it. Clearly there is no further use for the old-time narrowness, prejudice and uncharitableness between the churches, but that there is practical use for distinctively denominational consecration is more and more apparent. Denominationalism, providing as it does more compact and homogeneous communions, is more favorable for the growth of fellowship. This is seen in the fact that there is more brotherhood, more fellowship in small sects than in large ones. Then again denominationalism classifies men according to their convictions in all the particulars of belief. Now it takes these two things, unity of faith and fellowship, to bring out all the moral energies, to generate all the vital force of the practical aggressive church, essential to the successful prosecution of its great work.

There is still another aspect of the question. Many denominations is the most manifest feature of Protestantism. The Roman Catholic church represents the idea of external unity. Either the one or the other must express the divine mind in respect to the wise policy of the church suited to the peculiar conditions of this age, unless indeed we are prepared for the conclusion that the church is no longer guided by the divine providence. Which of the two therefore is God's plan? In which is there the most spiritual unity? Which must be credited with the progress of mankind? Which has been doing and is now doing God's work in

the world? These questions carry their own answer.

We do not say that external division is normal and ideal, but we do recognize as a fact that the divisions of the church have been its strength and not its weakness. Never before has Tunkerism, for instance, been so prosperous, never before has it felt such an impulse of aggressiveness, never before has it inaugurated so many forms and installed such wise, energetic gospel work along all lines of moral, intellectual and spiritual effort as in the comparatively short period since the divisions occurred. The lack of harmony, the constant friction between progressive, conservatives and old orders while they were in the same body paralyzed the energies of the church. But since their segregation according to conviction, sympathy and fellowship, the whole body has taken on new life, has become aggressive, has widened its sphere of usefulness, has reformed its methods, has put forth abounding energies, so that it can be truly said that particularly those elements of the church represented by the Brethren and the German Baptists never before had such a prospect of expansion and growth. The outlook before both is not only encouraging, it is inspiring, and needs only a strong pull, a long pull, and a pull altogether, to enter upon a career of unprecedented prosperity and victory.

Perhaps our most important conclusion is this: Where you can freely labor, there God put you. Do your best work within the limits of your own church. To her devote your best energies, upon her altar present your greatest sacrifices, your choicest gifts. We were made sad to hear a good brother hint somewhat plainly in a recent article in the EVANGELIST that a certain line of work to which he was devoted, he felt constrained by the backwardness of his own church, to go outside of her limits for the easing of his conscience and the discharge of his zeal. How manifest is the un wisdom of this course. His example, his earnest insistence, his persevering zeal in the church where this line of work is as yet insufficiently developed would be worth infinitely more to the cause of righteousness and the cause of humanity, would bear in the expanding future infinitely greater fruits, than all the little he can do in another communion where he would only be an integer, his example, his stimulating leadership, his pioneer zeal no creative factor. Stay by your people. Unite with theirs all your gifts and all your efforts. Do your work just in that corner of the vineyard where God in his providence put you. This is the wisdom which has grown from the experience of many others besides brilliant Tom Dixon.